

DESIGNING CERAMICS FOR SOCIAL EVENTS

by

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My work considers the role of functional objects in common rituals. I am investigating how handcrafted ceramics can fit the demands of social events in both functional and decorative capacities. Specifically my thesis work is made for use in the graduate student exhibition in the Wellington B. Gray Gallery at East Carolina University. The work comprises all of the serving and diningware for the reception and is arranged as a serving display throughout the duration of the exhibition. A one-handed plate and cup integrated set, designed to have a free hand at buffet receptions while eating, moving around, and socializing is available to be used by the guests of the event. In addition to the body of work created for the gallery space, process materials used in the creation of the work are also on display. The contextual research for this project includes historical analyses of social servingware, interviews with gallery owners, caterers, and event attendees, as well as real-world testing of the pieces. The work addresses the demands and parameters for events at the venue; investigating how handmade ceramics can solve issues of usability, aesthetic opportunities, and waste management. The subsequent goal for this project is to serve as a model that could be replicated at future public events.

DESIGNING CERAMICS FOR SOCIAL EVENTS

A Thesis

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Master of Fine Arts

by

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I would like to dedicate this work to my beautiful and talented wife Laura who has always helped push my ideas one step further, and to my lively daughter Adriana who I am looking forward to seeing much more often.

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PROBLEM STATEMENT: ROLE OF OBJECTS

Identity

My research is focused on dishware used in social events. These are special occasions where a host gathers a group to socialize with food and drinks. Examples include receptions for weddings, funerals, domestic parties, and art gallery exhibitions. Whether the event is at the hosts' home, a business, or at a rental facility, they are trying to set a particular mood; casual, formal, celebratory, or somber. The atmosphere is created by all elements of the experience including the invitation, seating, decorations, activities, and the food and drinks provided. All of these elements involve physical materials which work together to create the concept of the event for the guests. Whether the event is indoor or outdoor makes an impact on what kitchen facilities may be available. Also, the weather on the day makes a difference on the type of objects desired. The research and physical outcome from this project is largely about the relationship that people have with objects in these kinds of social settings.

When someone is selecting dishware to serve their guests, many factors can be prioritized. Some items are chosen out of convenience, being the easiest option to attain which fulfills the basic need. Others are chosen because of style, as their appearance may fit the event's theme.

Dishware with highly functional attributes could be preferred over even more attractive and cheaper options. Then there are also items that are significant because of a personal attachment. Ideally, servingware design can incorporate all of these elements. The functional interface and visual display of food service items at public events can be very important to the guest's

perception of the event. When trying to set a mood, the look of the serving dishes and experience of using them affects the lasting impression of the event for the guests and can reflect on perception of the venue. Because of these factors, there is opportunity for custom-designed dishware which incorporates the needs of large events. The process for this research project has included discovering the preferences of users in these settings, both hosts and guests, and creating servingware that attempts to address the aesthetic and functional elements listed above.

Maker's Perspective

In order to see how handmade ceramics can fit within the environment of larger events, it is important to examine two of the most common options available for servingware; single-use paper and plastics, and white-glazed stoneware or porcelain. Both of these categories have certain advantages and disadvantages which can be leveraged. Single-use dishware is chosen in a large part because of convenience. It is relatively inexpensive, and since it is thrown away, cleanup is easy for the host. However, there are also downsides. When designing the character of an event, defined by the desired mood, type of food, formality of meal, formality of dress, and design and decoration of the venue, the tactile and perceptual quality of disposable dishware may be inconsistent with the other elements that create the atmosphere. Also, a particular design concern of this project is that disposable plates and cups are made to fit a variety of dining situations, and do not adequately address the common situation of eating and drinking while moving around and socializing. In the methodology section I detail my solution to this issue. A by-product created in exchange for the convenience of single use dishes is tons of waste that

ends up landfills. The US society is growing increasingly aware of the problems with storing all the waste we produce. In this environment, guests at social events will likely appreciate the presence of reusable items. There is an opportunity for custom-made ceramics to provide an elegant and reusable option which can address a variety of dining situations.

Factory produced white-glazed stoneware and porcelain are very common in domestic ware, and are an industry standard in the catering, restaurant, and rental businesses. A major advantage of these products is the integrity of the material, Ceramics with the right composition and glaze are easy to clean, dishwasher safe, microwavable, and oven safe. These products are sold through national and international companies with designs that could fit in nearly any context. What has resulted from this prioritization is a sterile appearance. As hosts, caterers, or event organizers are designing a serving display, stark white plates are often not ideal to fit the mood of the event. When designing hand-made alternatives to these it is important to maintain the integrity of the materials while taking advantages of opportunities for more colorful surfaces and expressive forms.

This project is intended to fit within the parameters of the industries around social events. This means that the work is designed to be unique alternatives to what is available to hosts, caterers, and rental companies while using the parameters that make the current products work within their systems. These considerations will be discussed throughout this paper and include material appearance and integrity, production processes, usability, style, dimensions, and volume.

Habits, Conventions, and Culture

In order for event organizers to shift their material preferences and choose ceramics, the impetus for change has to already be in place within the culture of the United States. The purchase or potentially rental of handmade ceramic dishes will be a higher cost than using disposable dishes. The following will go through some of the cultural factors that have the potential to outweigh this cost. There are many movements within the country that support the integration of handmade ceramics to social events.

There has been a rise of potters across the country that are designing dishware to be used in restaurants. The collaboration between chef and potter allows for the dinner to be a coherent experience where the dishes are designed to compliment the characteristics of the food. For instance Robbie Bell is a collector of pottery turned potter, as well as the owner of Eighteenth Street Inn and catering company in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. After using collected ceramics to serve meals in the bed and breakfast, Bell started Speckled Dog Pottery where he makes pottery for domestic sale and for use in his businesses. Dave Becker, owner and chef of restaurants Sweet Basil and Juniper in Boston claims that the “The era of the boring white plate is gone.” He has created colorful, chunky, off-center plates and bowls he uses at his own restaurants as well as Tavern Road and Asta in Boston (<http://www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/food-dining/2014/10/21/chef-potter-sells-his-tableware-for-first-time/Mhw0K1qZb8iRZ92ubTkJMI/story.html>). Another example is the work by potter John Shedd in New Jersey in collaborations with several local restaurants. Chef Ben Nerenhausen of Minstral says, “We prepare unique dishes and, since people eat first with their eyes, we

recognize the importance of presentation. John is able to provide us with serving plates, platters, and bowls in the different shapes and sizes we need. The pieces he creates evoke dishes such as these red and yellow beets on this earthen plate that is perfectly rustic, almost torn from the earth (<http://www.towntopics.com/wordpress/2014/01/22/local-potter-teams-up-with-chefs-to-create-service-ware-that-complements-their-food/>”). These issues are also relevant to the design of ceramics for larger social events. There are opportunities for potters to collaborate with hosts and chefs of these events, as well as caterers and rental companies. Most potters who make utilitarian work do so with cupboards and countertops in mind. The creation of work for restaurants and banquet tables offers a different set of parameters and opportunities.

There has been a large shift to support local economies, particularly around the food industries such as bakers, farmers, beer brewers, coffee roasters, and community owned grocery stores. This local support exists in restaurants and catering companies, and It is a logical extension of this trend to further include potters as part of the community dining experience. During an interview with Ms. Coleen Speaks, owner of 2014 Independent Weekly “Best in the Triangle” award winning PoshNosh catering in Raleigh, North Carolina, she discussed how she is interested interested in using locally sourced products whenever possible. The following information is also featured prominently on the company website ‘about us’ section:

Raleigh and the surrounding areas have an abundance of small farms and ethnic influences that are an inspiration to our menu planning. PoshNosh utilizes the same amazing resources of this area and plans all menus around the seasons. This insures that our clients are getting the freshest, healthiest, and best tasting product available. We also take pride in supporting local farmers and

locally owned businesses and in turn, the local economy. PoshNosh recycles, composts and utilizes green paper products whenever possible. We feel strongly about giving back to the local community and do so by donating our time and food (<http://www.poshnoshcatering.info/about.html>).

These statements present aspects of contemporary culture that can be receptive to the use of bespoke ceramics. Additionally, Ms. Speaks said that she was interested in serving ware that could 'soften the look' of her displays which include eclectic elements such as driftwood. She felt that another option than national brands offering only white designs such as 10 Strawberry Street would benefit her concepts. Another important issue raised in the PoshNosh statement is the desire for responsible waste management, which supports the introduction of reusable items wherever they are viable. According to data from the EPA, plastic and paper plates and cups made 2,350,000 tons of waste in 2012 alone. Much of this percentage certainly came from social events including parties and receptions where there is an opportunity to shift towards a more durable material.

(http://www.epa.gov/solidwaste/nonhaz/municipal/pubs/2012_msw_dat_tbls.pdf).

It should be said, however, that while using durable materials over time instead of single-use materials will reduce the amount of trash produced, further evaluations of the energy costs associated with production of the different materials should be done to provide a better overall understanding impact of durable and single-use material options.

SPECIFIC AIMS: SERVICE AND PLACEMENT

Art Exhibition Receptions

This thesis project is presented in the Wellington B. Gray Gallery at East Carolina University for the graduate student thesis exhibition. The venue was chosen in part because of the design opportunities in the format of the reception. The following criteria make the Gray Gallery an interesting venue: there will be a large number of people attending the reception for the exhibition, guests will be dressed in semi-formal to semi-casual attire, and the guests will be walking around while contemplating the artwork, serving themselves from the buffet, eating, drinking, and socializing. Based on the available space and desired traffic flow, there are few tables to stand around, or benches to sit on, therefore food items will be held while the patrons eat and mingle. Currently disposable clear plastic plates and cups are used at the gallery, which is the most common solution for events where guests are walking around while eating. These characteristics are shared with events for a variety of other celebratory occasions and at many different venues. In this way, the Thesis Exhibition at the Gray Gallery is serving not only as an appropriate destination based on the theme of the show and intended function of the pieces, but also as an accurate research testing ground for the use of these dishes other spaces.

The serving ware is designed to be a cohesive display to fit the atmosphere of the event. This includes a punch bowl, serving platters, water dispensers, flower vases, and the plates and cups. Finding the best solution to the mobile style of eating for this kind of event, including the ergonomics of the cups and plates is the largest focus of the design effort for this. This effort was

prioritized because of the absence of a comfortable solution in available products, and the desire to replace the single use dishes with elegant and reusable designs.

Characteristics of Other Social Events

Most social gatherings are meant to appreciate and strengthen ties to family, friends, and colleagues. They are opportunities for people to share stories, memories, and interests. Wedding receptions, birthday parties, holiday celebrations, citizenship parties, dinner parties, and corporate functions are occasions where people get together to socialize. These are all celebrations: of love, holidays, career opportunities, or friendship. Wakes are occasions where people gather to remember the life of a loved one. In this case food and conversation are integral aspects of an event in which people wish for comfort and elegance. All of these different functions share some similar attributes, including the serving of food as a central activity. This is often done in a buffet format where guests don't have assigned seats and free to move around and mingle while eating.

Food has long been an important aspect of people coming together to celebrate. Food sharing goes back to prehistory, with ethnographic and archaeological studies indicating that, "*the drive to achieve advantages through feasting* is probably the single most important impetus behind the intensified production of surpluses beyond household needs for survival (Dietler & Hayden p.27)." This means that there is a deep human need to gather people together over food to build social, political, familial, and economic relationships. The criteria for how much or how little

food and of what quality are somewhat set by cultural traditions, and are not arbitrary. The food service and the objects that facilitate it are integral to the desire for guests to feel comfortable, welcome, and to build positive relationships with the individuals or organizations hosting them.

Use of Service Objects in Comparison to Event Formality

The type of food, dining format, dress code, decorations and other formalities are all tied together to create the style of an event. A backyard cookout and a seated wedding reception are examples of the levels of the spectrum above and below the target for this project. Cookouts tend to be very casual. It is common to serve the food on whatever is most readily available, like burgers on a baking sheet and beer in a solo cup. Guests can serve themselves as they wish throughout the event. At the plated wedding reception, guests are given a specific time to eat, and the wait staff takes care of serving the food. The presentation of the food happens on the plate, and the guests will never see the serving devices. Stemware and fine china are commonly used in these kinds of events, which are commonly seen as the some of the highest formality of materials. This project focuses on the function of events with a central self-service buffet with formality somewhere between these two examples. Plates and cups are presented next to the serving dishes, and guests will take their food, and move around the venue while mingling, eating, and drinking. The dress tends to be semi-casual to semi-formal, and will have a decorative food service display. The dishware I have designed maintains some formality of material by using a white clay body, while incorporating less formal linear designs and color

applications than will occur on the china. An in-depth analysis of surface design is available in the methodology section.

To find out more about the use of dishware at well organized social events, I interviewed Laurel Askue, who oversees the annual benefit auction at Penland School of Crafts in Penland, North Carolina. This event has been going on for 30 years, and draws several hundred potential donors from around the country. There are several types of events over the span of a weekend. I was interested in Penland in particular, because the school teaches handcrafting of functional objects in a variety of materials, including clay. This gave the perspective of hosts who expressly value hand-crafted goods. We discussed the pros and cons of using custom designed ceramics for different types of events at the annual auction. She said that using reusable hand-crafted pieces was important to the organization, but are not used at this dinner. They have a catering company that comes in, brings 'plain white plates', and takes them away. The streamlining of this process is important, and took precedence over the use of more unique plates and cups. She said that if the rental company offered handcrafted items she would consider them, but at this auction the most important thing for the donors to focus on the auction items.

There are two other important events during this weekend which better fit the format of the dining situations for which I am designing, a coffee and pastries before visiting artist studios, and a cocktail reception for particularly generous donors. At the morning coffee and pastries, custom made mugs are given to the guests to commemorate the event, paired with napkins or plastic plates to serve the food. Last year, the serving bowls and platters were collected from the community of potters to make the event a cohesive experience. The desire to use handcrafted

serving items and mugs aligns with the goals of this project. An integrated plate and cup set would work well with the type of meal and (while not made for this thesis project) a handled mug could be designed for hot beverages. The special donor cocktail and hors d'oeuvres reception was similarly aligned.

In order to get a balanced perspective from event organizers not explicitly related to the arts, I met with Ms. K Woolard, Director of Special Events and University Program Specialist and Ms. Jill Brown, Manager of the Events at the Chancellor's Residence. Both Ms. Brown and Ms. Woolard have extensive experience organizing dinners and receptions for guests of the Chancellor of East Carolina University Dr. Steven Ballard and his spouse, Mrs. Nancy Ballard. The university has a two sets of dishes that they commonly use. There is a very formal set of china with gold banding and the ECU emblem which is used for small dinners. Most other events are served using plain glass plates with no decoration. They agreed that it would be good to have dishes that were of a level of formality somewhere in between what they currently have, and that examples of my plate and cup sets I showed them could fit into that. They also agreed that they would work well for receptions with light hors d'oeuvres or pastries, and that a larger plate could be designed for heavy hors d'oeuvres receptions.

Design Opportunities for Ceramics

There are a range of events that share the similar flow of buffet dining with little or no seating to allow social mingling while moving around the venue. Hosts will likely be trying to set a

different mood, and will pick their food service display style depending on their personality and the purpose of the event. The work I have made for the exhibition in the Gray Gallery could easily be presented in different form, color, and patterns to match the atmosphere of other social events, joyous or somber. They can function as a smaller set owned privately for parties, but I am also interested in the ability for the pieces to be available to rent through a caterer or rental company. This full-service delivery and pick-up option would reduce the cost and commitment associated with using ceramic dishes and also allow the host to use different styles of surfaces at different events instead of committing to one set. Further discussions with these kind of companies will be the next steps in moving this project forward.

People are accustomed to using reusable serving dishes in large events, but plates and cups are typically made of disposable paper or plastic. These materials are often not commensurate with the quality of materials in the rest of the display, and have not been designed with the act of eating while walking and socializing in mind. The ceramic alternatives I propose allow for a reusable option that can be styled to the preferences of the host, and resolve many issues of usability for the guests. The design research for the plates and cups have resulted in a set that is comfortable to hold with one hand, and gives a designated area for the cup that prevents it from sliding around the plate and helps block food from interacting with the cup. This gives the user the ability to have a free hand with which to eat or greet others without having to choose between holding food or a beverage.

In addition to the design helping the guests to be more comfortable, ceramics is commonly considered to be a higher quality material than disposable plastics or paper. Using elegant

ceramic dining-ware could positively affect the guest's concept of the event, and make the whole service more cohesive. Glazed porcelain and stoneware ceramics have a hard, non-porous surface which is good for serving food and beverages over time. These dishes can be hand washed or cleaned in a dishwasher, microwaved, and even put in the oven.

In order to take advantage of the benefits of reusable dishware, someone needs to be in charge of cleaning them. If an organization was to purchase a full set of 200 plates and cups along with all the servingware, one or two employees with a sink and a dishwasher could take care of it relatively quickly. This does add an additional burden, along with the cost of purchasing the dishes. For these reasons, I am interested in the renting these sets through a party supply company or caterer. This would make a convenient alternative to buying in terms of cost as well as providing the ability to alternate styles. This would mean selling the pieces to the rental company or caterer. They would then be delivered, arranged, and cleaned for host.

Display at the Wellington B. Gray Gallery

The dishware use and display for the graduate exhibition in the Gray gallery is unique in some ways to how the pieces will be used in future events. Since the reason for the exhibition is to celebrate this thesis project as well as the thesis work of the other graduate students in the School of Art and Design, the dining service is a stronger focus for the guests than it may be in other contexts. The exhibition reception is also an opportunity to collect data from the public on experience of using the dishes. This input, including interviews and visual documentation,

provides valuable feedback for evaluating the success of the project and to consider future projects.

The service set used during the reception is cleaned, and rearranged to show how it presents as a cohesive service for the remainder of the exhibition. In addition to the plate and cup sets, platters, beverage dispensers, bowls and vases designed for use in the exhibition, molds used in production of the work are also on display. These are meant to show the work that happened behind the scenes to make the pieces possible. The molds are also attractive in their own right.

METHODOLOGY: RESEARCH AND PRODUCTION

Design Research

Interviews and Observations at Receptions

My interest in this particular design problem came from a personal observation while at an art gallery reception that the methods of eating were very inconvenient. Having gone through the effort to dress up in more formal attire to go to an event which was intended to be elegant, it seemed odd to be juggling a plate of hors d'oeuvres on top of a cup while struggling to shake the hand of a new acquaintance. My observations expanded into interviews with visitors to several art gallery receptions in Greenville, North Carolina. I asked several people in informal interviews how they currently dealt with handling a cup and plate at receptions, and if they thought it was a problem. Some people will put their cup on top of the plate, along with the food. Others will stretch out the fingers of one hand to grip both at once in order to have a free hand to eat. One person informed me they were good at laying the plate on their arm because they had been a server. The largest number of people will balance the plate on top of the cup. I then asked each person if they would prefer a one-handed set where the cup is located above the hand, and separated from the food, without specifying materials. The response to this question was very positive. Although the sample size was only about 20 people, everyone said they were interested in such a design.

After discovering the different methods that people use to manage a cup and plate at receptions, I documented several of these 'reception hacks' at an art exhibition reception in the Janice

Faulkner Gallery and Mendenhall Gallery, both located on campus at East Carolina University.

Following images reflect some of these approaches.



Figure A: Thirsty Faculty Members Putting off Drinking a Beverage in Order to Eat



Figure B: Ceramics Student Hannah Grantham Balancing a Plate on Her Cup to Deliver a Cup of

Water



Figure C: Art and Design Students Hovering by the Drink Table Before Going to View Artwork



Figure D: Ceramics Student Alexandra Ingle Demonstrates the 'Plate Cradling' Technique

Interviews with Rental and Catering Companies

The desire for more variety in hand-crafted servingware for public events was received positively in an interview with Ms. Coleen Speaks of PoshNosh Catering in Raleigh, North Carolina. Through discussion she mentioned that the white porcelain which is the majority of servingware available to caterers through suppliers like 10 Strawberry Street is too harsh for her displays. She suggested that there is opportunities for potters to team up with caterers to make a wider variety of styles for servingware. An interview with Kyle Sorsby of Any Occasion Party Rentals in Houston, Texas revealed his family rental company could be interested in teaming up with a small business to provide unique dishes for party events. These were mostly theoretical discussions without having the final products to present. Taking the finished products to these kinds of companies will be the next steps in moving forward with production, or gathering information to redesign aspects of the pieces based on their feedback.

Material Culture in the United States in Relation to Public Events

Historical Precedence

There have been sets that address a similar concern historically. I was aware that there were similar styles of dining sets that have been produced in the United States in the 20th century, but know nothing about them or what they looked like. I reached out to Dr. Margaret Carney, who is the director of the Dinnerware Museum in Ann Arbor Michigan. She gave me information on the bridge sets which were particularly popular from 1930s to 1970s. Dr. Carney describes them as follows. “Basically, beginning in at least the 1930s with the Salem China Mandarin Tricorne

"bridge sets" -- or snack sets -- ladies sat with these on their laps while chit chatting with friends at special events. I don't believe they were intended to be carried around at a cocktail party -- they are all a bit heavy and awkward for that. There is a special place on the dish/tray for the beverage, be it soup, coffee, or something else. Most were intended for coffee to go with a snack. Some had places for ones cigarettes, very very very close to the beverage!" These were interesting examples of solutions to a similar issue I was trying to resolve, and were inspirational for the designs of my final outcome.



Figure E: Salem China Mandarin Tricorn Bridge Set 1930s Designed by Don Schreckengost, et al 9" Plate Corner to Corner, 3.75" Cup Diameter
Photo by Bill Walker for Dinnerware Museum, Ann Arbor



Figure F: Unmarked Luncheon Tray with Ashtray
Photo by Bill Walker for Dinnerware Museum, Ann Arbor



Figure G: Glidden Pottery Snack Set 1940s-1950s 9.5" Wide
Photo by Bill Walker for Dinnerware Museum, Ann Arbor

Bespoke Design

This project is a part-way point between individually crafted ceramics and mass produced ceramics in terms of production and style. Due to the desired qualities of the pieces, including specificity of dimensions, replicability of the form, quantity necessary, and the irregularity of form, the slip casting process was necessary. This process involves creating plaster molds in which liquid clay is poured in order to reproduce the same shape in multiples. Often when people, and particularly potters, hear the words slip casting, they think mass production. However the original piece was crafted and refined by hand over many steps, and there is a considerable amount of time and handiwork that goes into the finishing of each individual piece in the finishing processes. These processes are streamlined as much as possible, and are much faster than making each piece from scratch, but are not as standardized or efficient as a corporate production.

This scale of production allows for an interesting place in the market. The number of pieces made in a particular style can be scaled to fit the needs of the customer. With a small pottery business there is great opportunity to build a relationship with customers needing only 5 sets of plates, and the ability to produce an order of 500 sets of plates. Also, this work is also able to reach a price point that is in between that of individually crafted pottery, and mass produced work.

In addition to drawing inspiration from the designs of the Glidden Pottery lunch set, this business model is similar to that of the pottery. Up to 30 potters were employed by the company (1940-

1957), and designs were set by Glidden Parker and other company designers. Customers would request particular forms with particular decorations and glazes to fit their taste and budget.

Going back even further, custom manufactured products were the standard for many industries before the industrial revolution. This meant that there was a connection between the maker of a product and customer before the pieces were produced. A dress, for example would have been made to fit the measurements of the person for whom it was being made. Ceramics were often produced similarly. The customer would decide what style they want, and the type of decoration. The pieces would then be made to fill that order. This kind of service allows for a collaboration between customer and maker with a range of small to large orders. The bespoke production system also allows for more variability for the shape, style, and function of the pieces than with more standardized and mechanized methods of production. Being a studio craftsperson means that I am able to do limited runs of bespoke designs, and to make changes specific to customer's desires from just a few pieces up to several hundred.

Adjusted and Assimilated Design

As production of goods has become more efficient, the commercially available products have become more standardized. In ceramic production, this means that the majority of what is available in stores is designed to fit the needs of as many situations as possible. While this has brought the cost of production down, it has also limited the possibility of the customer to affect

the outcome of the product. This means that more people are able to afford these pieces, but they are not necessarily as well suited to particular occasions and customers.

The addition of plastic and paper disposable dishes to the traditions of entertaining has democratized the production of tableware even further by providing an inexpensive option. Fineline brand plates, for example, are often made to mimic glass and crystal dishware, but will have a very different feel to them. They are meant to be used one time and then thrown away. The integration of these standardized products into the mainstream has become part of the tradition of eating. These dishes are used ubiquitously, but they do not necessarily fit the desires of the customers. This is where bespoke dishware can fill a void. The mass produced single use or reusable pieces are made to apply to as many events and customers as possible, and do not always take into consideration how they are used in events. This is particularly true in the subject of this research, the mobile dining experience.

Studio Implementation

Design Application

Based on the understanding of how people are currently addressing the issue of juggling a plate and cup in reception situation, I began to make preliminary models for what a unified set could be like that would resolve their usability issues. The features emphasized are the size, weight, fit to hand and fingers, isolation of the cup from food. Through the production and testing of these pieces other elements became important. All of these designs would need refinement in order to

not stack well, which is necessary for larger events. The cups were able to slide around and rattle in the roomy resting areas. A resting point for the fingers to support the plate was good, but should not allow fingers to reach into the food area (I & J). This support area also needed to be positioned so that left or right handed people could hold the plate without eating over the cup (J). The support should allow the plate to be held with the cup over the palm, in order to balance the weight of the cup with more stability (K)



Figure H

Figure I



Figure J

Figure K

After narrowing down the desired qualities of these designs, the final plate was started. This version features a grooved rim, which allows for the thumb to support the piece at any point around the rim. This rim is elevated to fit the hand, and to provide a barrier to prevent food from slipping off of the plate. The cup seating area was moved further into surface of the plate in order to consolidate the space, and allow the set to be held more comfortably. This seating was located between the height of the base of the plate and the rim, as to prevent it from disrupting the stackability of the plates. A square plate was chosen so that the cup seating could fit in the corner and not disrupt the eating surface. Extra clay was then added around this model in order to help the final slip cast pieces to release from the mold (L and M). This clay was removed after casting. The seating area for the cup was made separately and attached to the form. The seating features a domed surface to dissuade users from putting food in the way of the cup, and to help the cup, which has a base with a matching curve to grip onto the plate better. A thorough

description of the mold making processes that turned this model into the final outcome are included in Appendix A.

The cup design was made by throwing a form upside down on a potter's wheel. A plaster casting of the cup seating from the plate was used to make the base, in order to ensure of close fitting of the two. This kind of precision was helpful to cut down on the ability of the cup to slide on the plate. The final version of the cup holds 9 oz., which is a standard size cup for catered receptions with wine, punch, or water. The form is flared from bottom to top which is helpful functionally to increase the volume without taking up too much plate surface, and without getting tall enough to become tippy. This shape is also significantly better at stacking than previous versions (Q).



Figure L

Figure M



Figure N



Figure O



Figure P: Glaze and Material Tests with Early Cup Design



Figure Q Plate and Cup Stacking with Early Cup Design



Figure R: Glaze and Material Testing



Figure S: Glaze and Material Testing

This project was intended to be a cohesive display. This meant that visual elements needed to be repeated throughout the forms and decorations of the different pieces. After establishing the shape of the plates based on functional and visual factors, each other item was made to replicate the appearance of the plates. Each serving dish was altered to be softly squared, and given a wide rim. The surfaces were kept smooth. The volume and dimensions of the pieces were based largely on the pieces used by Aramark catering company for the previous event at the Gray Gallery. In order to ensure that the pieces would fit within the intended amount of food, and serve the intended number of people, I measured the serving items that they used, and kept my pieces within a close tolerance of them. Inspecting the display at this event also helped to show some of the serving items that are used in addition to the large platters and bowls. For instance the cheese platter comes with a separate tray to hold the crackers, the vegetable platter comes

with a separate bowl for ranch, and the sandwich platter comes with a bowl for condiment packets.

The serving platters measure around 20” diagonally with 16” interior space. Additionally a 1.5” wall was used to deepen the pieces, allowing them to hold much more food than a flat tray, while not being so tall that they appeared to be bowls. Previous versions of these platters had been too flat and too bowl shaped to serve the amount and type of food at the reception. These pieces were thrown and then trimmed on the wheel using 6” foam cut to the shape of the squared interior. This provided support evenly across the pieces to prevent slumping during the trimming process. A three ringed foot was added on the bottom of the platters so that they would keep their shape during the firing process.

The ice bowl measures 11” tall by 18” wide. The piece has a substantial horizontal rim in terms of thickness and diameter, which was intended to also serve as the handles to carry the piece. This piece was thrown in multiple sections on the wheel in order to achieve the necessary size. The punch bowl was throw in one piece, and trimmed on the wheel, and squared with a rasp and smoothing ribs. As with the platters, thick cushion foam was placed inside of the piece in order to take pressure off of the rim while trimming. This helped to prevent cracking due to the weight of the pieces. A water dispenser was creating by purchasing a stainless spout fixture online. This piece comes with a rubber gasket that screws on to an opening in the bottom of the vessel. The dispenser is made in three separate parts, the base/stand, 3 gallon container, and lid. The best fit of the lid to the body was aligned during the glazing process, and a blue stripe will help ensure a good fit in the future by encouraging the user to make them line up.

The shrimp cocktail server, flower vases, and cracker tray all have a similar rim which is proportionally smaller than that of the platters, ice bowl and punch bowl. The smaller rim is close in dimensions to the one on the plates, instead of being proportional to the size of the pieces. This decision was made based on the way these pieces needed to be manipulated to become square, as well as making them easier to clean by limiting undercuts inside the forms. The shrimp cocktail server is about 12” across with a 4” bowl thrown in the middle for dipping. The cracker tray is about the same length as a rectangle, 5” wide, and 5” tall. This piece could fit 4 rows of crackers, two on top of each other.

The flower vases helped to add some vertical design and color through the addition of flowers to the food display. These pieces measure around 7.5” in height, 6” wide and 3” wide with a 1” rim around them the height was intended to fall between the low and wide platters and the tall punch and ice bowls and water dispenser. With a rectangular shape, they are able to have the visual impact of larger round vase without needing to use as many flowers.

Production Processes

The production processes for this project came from first establishing the needs of the pieces to function in context. These criteria included the functionality of the work, both as individual items and as a group, the material integrity, style considerations and perceptions of materials, and the number of pieces needed. After weighing all of these factors the plate and cup sets were created

through the use of slip casting molds, and all of the other items were made individually on the potter's wheel.

One of the first decisions when creating this work was to use a white clay body. Different types of clay are perceived differently by the public. Porcelain is commonly seen as the most formal type of clay, and given that the type of events this work is being designed to fit are relatively formal, this material preference seemed appropriate.

There were several criteria that needed to be met with the production of the plate and cup sets. The pieces needed to be light-weight enough to be held comfortably, the cup needed to fit snugly onto the plate seating which worked best in the corner of a plate, the plates and cups needed to all be interchangeable, they needed to stack well and be the same dimensions. The pieces needed to be made quickly to be able to produce hundreds of items, and keep labor costs down. All of these factors point to mold making as a solution. Making plaster molds to cast the forms helps to ensure accurate shapes, and makes it much easier to produce irregular forms such as the off-center cup seating. The mold making process is described extensively in Appendix A, but generally is the process of pouring liquid clay into a desired form made from absorbent plaster. The plaster wicks the water out of the clay, and after the excess liquid is poured out, a shell is left behind. Various slip recipes were tested for warping and porosity, and a very stable, vitreous (non-porous), somewhat off-white clay body was chosen. This recipe is a mid-range clay body, chosen to fire in an oxidation environment to help standardize the firing process, and prevent some of the slumping caused by high-fire temperatures. The off-white color of the slip is subtle, but comes from higher percentage of non-porcelain clay ingredients that make the slip easier to

trim and manipulate, mature at a lower temperature, and make it less likely to slump than straight porcelains.

Refinements to Design Based on Real-World Testing

The dining sets were made based on information from critiques, personal discussions, and my own inferences for what might be comfortable and function well. I had the opportunity to actually put them to test to a larger audience at two venues before the final designs went into production. The first was a dinner at AJ McMurphy's restaurant in Greenville, NC where my ceramics classmates and some thesis committee members ordered several appetizers and ate them off of the plates with some water to drink. This event included several styles of glazing colors and linear designs. Several people were interested in mixing the color of the cup with the color of the plate. This information was incorporated into the final designs by making several combinations of white, green, and blue available on the inside of the cup, outside of the cup, and dipped at various percentages of the plate. It seemed that if the entirety of the cup and surface of the plate were solid colors, it was too overwhelming. This mixture of all white, white and green, and white and blue allowed for there to be contrast between the surfaces.

Another event where these dishes were used was a reception for a show titled Fluxus, where ceramics concentration students exhibited in the Burroughs Wellcome Senior Gallery at ECU's Jenkins Fine Arts Center. This was a larger crowd of around fifty people from around the art department. The dishes were available to use, and I asked several people about their experience

with them. A large percentage of the people I asked said they would have preferred a larger cup. This resulted in a redesign of the cup to bring it up to the 9 oz. size. Another issue that arose was that the walls of the plate are not deep enough to push viscous dips onto a chip. This resulted in several people using the side of the cup to push guacamole onto their tortilla. This could be resolved by making the walls of the plate deeper, to give more of a vertical surface to push against. This idea will be incorporated into future redesigns of the idea. For the scope of this project, the information was used when consulting with Interim Gallery Director Tom Braswell about what kinds of food to serve at the graduate thesis exhibition where the final designs would make their debut. This meant deciding to provide shrimp cocktail in lieu of spinach and artichoke dip.

All of the other service items were made individually on the wheel before the Gray Gallery reception. Only an early version of a punch bowl and a platter were tested at a previous event. The platter was found to be too flat to hold much, and the punch bowl was a little too small for a larger venue. All of the other items were loosely based on dimensions of items used by the Aramark university catering, and my previous experiences as a potter.

The decision to make these pieces on the wheel instead of by making molds was out of the lack of necessity. Most of the factors that made slip casting necessary for the plates and cups did not apply to the other servingware. The only irregularity is that they were all made in a square shape, but this was relatively easy to resolve case by case. Mold making for all of these items could be possible, but would also present several unique challenges and require an extensive investment of time.

The clay used to make throw these pieces needed to match the color of the slip casting clay. For this a mid-range white stoneware was chosen from STARworks in Star, NC. This company uses local materials and environmentally conscious practices whenever possible, including collecting rainwater from their extensive roof to use in the clay. The clay that I purchased has some larger particles that helps it be used for throwing, altering, and making attachments. This clay had very little cracking even though it was being stretched and manipulated quite a bit.

The color of these pieces was the same as what was used on the plates and cups. There were different percentages of the pieces marked off as green or blue, with the rest being white. This effect was achieved using artists tape and newspaper or plastic to mask off the remainder of the piece. The glaze was then sprayed onto the piece. The masking was removed, and the clear glaze was sprayed over the remainder of the piece, by holding up a piece of newspaper or sponge to block excessive overspray into the colored area.

After an initial investment of time and materials in making of the molds for the plates and cups, two to three items can be made from each mold per day. With ten molds that makes twenty to thirty pieces, with the opportunity to make more molds and hire assistants as needed. Certain features were added to make the pieces release from the mold. An extra strip was added around the plate rim, to establish the desired thickness of the rim, and give a flange of clay to pull on gently in order to aid the release of the plates from the mold. Without this, the surface tension of the flat dining area is great enough that they would be very difficult to release. This feature was added to early versions of the cup molds, to their detriment. The final molds finished with the

rim flush on the edge of the mold. This allows for any extra clay to be trimmed flat with a plastic tool before it sticks and causes warping.

The need for replicability and tall stacks of these pieces affected the overall design details. The pieces have been fine tuned and modified with consideration that they need to stack straight up, for each cup and plate to be interchangeable, and to maintain consistency in weight and thickness.

The needs for these pieces to work in the processes of these events was important. Cleaning of the work in dishwashers means that the clay surface can not have much texture. A clean glossy glaze with low crazing, and vitrified clay body are important to prevent staining. This caused me to test several clay bodies and choose an off-white color in exchange for higher vitrification and a reduction in slumping.

On-Site Implementation

The Wellington B Gray Gallery is both the venue to display the thesis body of work, and the very type of venue where the work was designed to be used. Based on this unique opportunity, and with consultation with Interim Gallery Director Tom Braswell, the food area was brought out from the very back of the gallery into the main gallery area. By contacting Aramark, they confirmed they were able to transfer the food from their trays to the ones I was providing. If there were more time, it would have been a beneficial exercise to bring the pieces to their kitchen

to be plated, and transported over in the delivery truck. This would provide useful feedback for how well the work would perform in the catering systems.

The work was arranged on two 12' tables and one 10' table with a neutral taupe tablecloth. The plates and cups were together. This is very unusual for a reception, where the plates are almost always first, followed by the food, and then drinks and cups at the end of the line. This is done to allow the user to retain a free hand to serve food, and once they no longer need it for this, take the beverage. Given the function of these one-handed sets, the two could be put together and still allow the user to have a hand free to gather food. After this area were the platters of cheese, sandwiches, fruit, vegetables, shrimp cocktail, cookies (for which we used glass trays), punch, ice, and then water. Four flower vases were distributed across the tables.

Two large pedestals with vitrines were set up to hold the molds that were used to produce the pieces. In between these is a loop of eight time-lapse videos documenting the throwing, trimming and glazing of platters and punch bowls, as well as glazing of the plates. These process materials were intended to show the techniques that went into the production of all of the work.

Use of Work in the Graduate Student Exhibition Reception

Everyone was welcomed to take a plate and cup to enjoy the food from the reception. They could walk throughout the gallery, and several bussing trays were located around the gallery. Terry, the employee from Aramark responsible for the event, Interim Gallery Director Tom Braswell,

Gallery Tech Support Technician Maria Modlin, and myself all helped with running the dishes through the dishwasher during the event. Several loads of dishes were run throughout the night, and some were placed back out for use during the reception. Hand washing all of the larger items and running the last load of the plates and cups took about forty five minutes after the end of the event.

After the opening event, the work was set back up to recreate the contextual display of a reception for the remainder of the month-long show. The pieces were given labels for what they would have been holding.

Post Reception Analyses

There were several concerns going into the event about how well the work would be received. Would patrons accustomed to using plastic and paper plates at these events feel comfortable walking around with potentially breakable ceramic dishes? Regardless of all the conjecturing, would the ergonomics of the plate sets actually allow the users to be more comfortable during the event? Would the platters and punch bowls hold an appropriate amount of food? Would the glazing and form of the pieces all together appear well as a set, or be too overwhelming?

Based on my observations of guests during the reception, and conversations with many individuals, it seems that the final designs of the work have resolved many of the issues that I sought out to address. As visitor named Katie Turner said, "I finally have a hand free for wild

gesticulations while I talk!” Another guest noted, “the cup really doesn’t move at all.” People seemed to be comfortable using the sets. I was also curious how many might break during the event. The only incident I am aware of was a cup that I personally dropped while loading the dishwasher. With the 9 oz. cup size, I did not hear anyone complain about the amount of liquid. A couple of observers to whom i spoke also enjoyed mixing different glazing style for the plate and cup. I observed only a couple of people using the cup seating on the plate to hold food, and they claimed to know it was not intended for that purpose, but wanted to maximize the food space. I considered this successful, because one of my goals was to prevent people from filling that area with food and unknowingly blocking their resting place for the cup.

Regarding the presentation of the food, metal design concentration class-mate Mary Klazca said, “you know, I realize that this is the same food that’s catered to all the events in the gallery, but somehow it looks better in your dishes... and I guess that’s what it’s all about.” Portions of each serving item were covered in either a majority or minority of green or blue, with the remainder being the clear glaze over white clay. The amount of white that was visible seemed to allow the colors to brighten up the display without being overwhelming. They all seemed to function as they were intended to, easily holding all of the food that was brought. The only issue noted from Tom Braswell was that one in particular of the platters was quite heavy. Since these pieces require quite a lot of trimming, it can be easy to not remove enough clay. This is something to pay close attention to in the future.

The beverage containers worked well with the punch and water. The punch bowl has a fairly steep curve in the bottom, which mirrored the shape of the ladle. The water dispenser did

function well, though the face was somewhat curved, making the spout aim slightly backwards. This did not significantly impact the function, but looked a bit odd, and could be avoided on future designs. Overall, each of the items actually performed as it was supposed to do.

PROJECTED OUTCOME

Opportunity for Bespoke Dishware in Public Event Settings

The expectations for this work were that the ceramic dishware would be an improvement on the single-use products which are commonly used during various kinds of receptions. The desire was to create a one-handed design which would make the guests feel more comfortable during the event by cutting out the need to juggle a plate and cup separately while trying to feed themselves or shake someone's hand. Furthermore, the idea is based on the perception that ceramics will feel like a more appropriate material in semi-casual to formal events where guest will be eating and moving around the venue, and that people would feel comfortable handling ceramics while mingling. The use of ceramics is further desired to have the benefit of cutting down on the amount of waste that comes from each event where they are used. All of the servingware is meant to give a host an option to have a cohesive table setting in form, style, and material.

Platform to Introduce the Practice to Broader Culture

The use of these ceramic dishes as part of the graduate thesis exhibition was intended to serve as a testing ground from which the viability of using handmade ceramics at large public events could be judged. The process of using them, and the functionality of the work would have to fit with the demands and parameters of catered events in order for the activity to have the possibility of reaching broader practice in contemporary United States culture.

This project is reliant on the current cultural shift to heightened awareness of waste management issues, an appreciation of handmade good and locally sourced products. By teaming up with local private patrons and business owners, I can make bespoke servingware based on color palette, form or patterns desired by the customer to fit their home, business, or other venue.

Potential for Repeatable Service

In order to verify the potential for repeatable service, interviews with gallery owners, event planners, caterer, and rental company representative were consulted during the production process. Each of these interviews conversations gave optimistic feedback, and narrowed the scope of future investigations towards collaborations rental companies, wedding and event planners, and private use. The work in it's final form has not been discussed with these groups, but will be the next steps moving forward with the project. There are many factors that are yet to be addressed to discover if the work will be viable for use in the rental market including pricing, production amounts, and investment commitment from these companies.

The potential to recreate the work to specifications is crucial to the work being viable on a larger scale. By aligning the production processes of slip casting and wheel throwing with the most appropriate forms, I have attempted to resolve this issue. More plates and cups could be made at any time to make replacements, or fill new orders using the molds made for this project. New molds can also be produced by using the master mold as those potentially wear out. The

dimensions of the thrown forms, clay and glaze materials have all been documented and can also be recreated.

CONCLUSION

I believe that this project successfully replaced the use of disposable dishware and created a cohesive dining experience for the reception of the graduate thesis exhibition in the Wellington B. Gray Gallery on April 17, 2015. The function of the pieces aligned with the intent, and the guests reacted positively to the appearance of the food display and material quality of the ceramics. Based on the experience cleaning up the dishes in the kitchen, the ceramics did add some more effort for clean up, but it was easily managed by a few people. The trade off of this effort was the prevention of around 200 single-use plates and cups from winding up in the trash. The serving items appeared to successfully perform their functional and decorative expectations. The results from this particular evening have provided confirmation that this project could successfully move forward in a broader scale to private and commercial audiences.

The design of this body of work have come quite far from the initial conception and preliminary prototypes. While the specific opportunities for dining on light hors devours while moving around a venue and interacting with others has been addressed, this project could now be expanded to fit other types of dining situations, and other types of food. The style of glazing was made with the gallery space in mind, and could also be adjusted to better fit other types of venues and celebratory occasions. There are many opportunities for future projects, and I hope for this thesis project to be a starting point for future design problems.

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PLATES



Plate 1: Dishes with Molds and Video Screen in Background



Plate 2: Cheese Platter



Plate 3: Whole Table Display with Food



Plate 4: One-Handed sets with Label



Plate 5: Serving Punch with a Full Plate



Plate 6: Stacks of Plates and Cups



Plate 7: Full Table Display with Molds



Plate 8: Casual Gesturing with Plate Set



Plate 9: Line of People with Plates Using Platters



Plate 10: Vegetable Platter



Plate 11: Visitors Interacting with the Monitor



Plate 12: Drink Station



Plate 13: Table Spread with Flowers



Plate 14: The Hand Shake, Multitasking with the Sets

APPENDIX

The mold making and slip casting processes are very useful tools for replicating ceramic forms. In this project, it allowed for hundreds of plates and cups to be made to close specifications. Hand-shaping each piece individually for this design would have been very difficult due to the square shape, the sectioned resting place for the cup on the plate, the matching curve of the bottom of the cup to the plate. The process works with the desire for consistency in size, volume, and thickness, and the necessity for the pieces to stack evenly. For all of these reasons, the use of a slip-casting mold was an efficient process to produce the pieces. The learning process of creating the molds, however, took a considerable amount of problem solving, time, and material. This appendix details the work that went into making the molds work properly, and discusses the solutions to streamline the process in the future.

A: Plate Mold Making Processes

Making the Initial Model

Porcelain was used to make this model because a smooth surface and white color were desired, as some clay color does transfer onto the plaster in casting. After establishing the size required for the piece, the original plate was thrown on the wheel as a round plate, then cut off with a wire and manipulated by hand into a square shape. This process created a undulating rim as well as a heavily curved interior surface. The undulating rim was a desirable feature. The curved plate

interior, however would have caused the piece to rock will resting on the table. Since this is a one piece mold with no foot ring, the interior form needed to be flat. This was corrected after the plaster was cast.

After the piece was squared, the designated cup area was added. This section was thrown separately, and dried slightly to prevent warping during the handling process. There was still some warping of the clay during this step, and in the future, I would have addressed this problem in the following way. I would still have thrown this piece and cast it directly on the bat without cutting it off of plastic throwing surface. After making this plaster negative, I would then cast a positive replica in plaster, making sure to keep it level during both castings. This would provide a non-malleable surface that would also not shrink or scuff easily. Another option is to use a lathe to carve the initial plaster cup seating, and eliminate the mold-making steps.

The cup seating was added to the squared plate after removing a section for it to fit. It was important to make this section separately so that it would be level and prevent the cup from rocking and making noise. Clay was added around the added piece to blend it into the plate surface.

An additional mass of clay was added around the rim of the plate form to make the mold more spacious, to establish the thickness of the plate edge, and to help release the clay plate from the plaster when making the final castings.

Casting the Initial Negative

After the clay model was finished, including eliminating any undercuts and straight verticals, the first plaster negative was cast. A thick thrown or slab built clay ring or aluminum flashing with a clay seal work well to make the exterior border. No mold release is necessary for the clay, plastic surface, or metal sheeting. A thickness of two inches is good for this portion to give the plaster strength while being handled. It is extremely important to level the piece before casting.

Refining the Form in Plaster

The interior curve of the plate caused by the squaring process was flattened down in this stage using stainless steel ribs. These were cut to various shapes and sizes to smooth out other blemishes on the surface. The rim of the plate was also smoothed where the clay was textured.

At this stage, a positive of the cup was cast from the surface of the plate which did not sit evenly when turned, revealing that the clay cup seat warped during the initial construction (why I suggest using plaster). To solve this, the mold was placed with the cup seat centered on a potter's wheel and trimmed using stainless steel ribs. However, since the clay and bat had not been leveled before casting, the back side of the mold had to first be trimmed level. This involved using a sharp pointed tool and a steadying bar. Due to these issues, it took several attempts to carve the cup seating to an even and level shape, which again could have been prevented by using a plaster piece with the original clay plate model.

Creating a Master Positive from Plaster, Rubber, and Silicone Caulk

After resolving all the fit, flattening, and surface quality issues, a plaster positive was cast off of the plaster negative. This is the piece that will be used to make replicas of the negative form (the final pieces used to cast clay). Having a master positive provides the opportunity to make as many working slip molds as desired. The negative mold surface was prepared with seven coats of Murphy's Oil Soap which were allowed to dry and polished with a microfiber cloth to smooth out any texture from brushing them on. This soap is absorbed into the mold, allowing it to resist plaster without altering the shape. Using metal flashing, the positive mold was then poured. After casting, more minor blemishes were removed from the surface of the positive.

Because of the flat shape of the plate mold, difficulties arose when casting subsequent negatives from the master mold. The two pieces were not coming apart easily, causing damage to the master mold. After troubleshooting and eliminating undercuts or improper Murphy Oil application as the problem, the problem lay in the suction caused by moisture between the two flat surfaces. In order to prevent this, flexible materials were investigated to create a easy to remove master positive.

Three cans of this product were sprayed into a plaster negative, forming a shell of rubber from around 30 coats. A plaster backer was cast over top of the rubber before releasing it from the mold. This was intended to give it support when making future negatives. The material would have worked well, but shrank considerably after being peeled from the mold, and would no

longer fit onto its plaster support after only a day. A flexible material that would not shrink was needed.

Silicone is an excellent mold-making material. However, most readily available mold making silicone products are quite expensive and temperamental. This makes silicone caulk a thrifty alternative. There are some inherent problems with it which must be remedied. The caulk takes a whole day to cure up to ¼ inch thickness. Thicker applications may never totally cure since it uses moisture from the air to complete this process. I discovered some online resources with recipes that solve these issues (cite). By using three to five drops of liquid glycerine and a dime sized blob of acrylic paint per ounce of silicone caulk, the caulk is able to fully cure within one to two hours even when applied thickly. The mixture is blended thoroughly, allowing the two additional ingredients to act as a catalyst for the silicone.

A successful master positive was created from this material. The plaster surface was prepped with dish soap to act as a release agent; otherwise silicone will permanently bond to the plaster. The first two layers of the mold were made from thin applications of straight silicone caulk in order to ensure that all the details were captured and that no air was trapped on the surface of the piece. These were allowed to cure overnight, and then layers of the paint/glycerine mixture were applied until the whole cast was over an inch thick. Several layers of cheesecloth were pressed into the uncured silicone between applications to help strengthen the final mold. A final layer of straight silicone was added at the end to fill any undercuts on the surface. This was used so that it would cure slowly and allow for time to find all the problem spots. A grid of ridges was made across the surface with silicone to act as keys for the plaster backer. This layer cured overnight.

Using metal flashing, a plaster backing was poured directly over the cured silicone. Plaster will not stick to cured silicone. After setting up, both pieces were peeled apart.

Casting Working Negatives

Casting negatives with the silicone positive works well. The master mold can be easily peeled out, and used again immediately. No prepping of the surface is necessary. Silicone does grip air bubbles in the plaster, which can be resolved by pouring the plaster in a very fluid state, and brushing the surface with your fingers before it starts to set. When pouring any plaster mold, air bubbles can be reduced by only pouring into a corner of the mold, and letting the fluid surface rise to push air out of the way.

B: Cup Mold Making Processes

Making the Initial Model

Due to the design requirements for this set, the process of creating an initial model of the cup was complex. The design of the plate has a designated area for the cup to rest with a sloped ring as a barrier as well as a bump inside the ring for the cup to sit snugly. Both of these elements were implemented to prevent the cup from sliding around the plate, and to designate the base of the cup as a non-food area. In order for the two pieces to fit together properly, the cup base was

cast directly from the surface of the finished plaster plate positive so that they would be mirrored opposites.

Casting the Initial Negative

The first attempts to make the cup form were done by prepping a plaster plate negative with oil soap, and attaching a thrown form around the cup seat area. By casting directly on the plate surface, the two pieces were opposites of the same form. However, it was very difficult to throw the interior of a ring of clay, cut it off of the wheel, level the surface of the plate, and attach the thrown form to the plate mold without altering the shape of the cup in an undesirable way.

The solution was to take a plaster positive of the plate mold, cut out just the cup seating area using a bandsaw. This was done with dry plaster, which cut easily on the bandsaw, and did not hurt the machine. This positive was used to form the base of the cup, and clay was added around it to make the desired form. The plaster section was saturated in water before applying the clay in order to prevent excessive drying of the clay. This piece was then trimmed on the wheel to the desired finished shape. A plaster negative was then cast around this form.

Creating a Master Positive and Working Negatives

Once the negative of the form was cast, the surface was prepped with oil soap. A plaster positive was cast. It is important that the cup molds stay level in order to make an level final product.

The plaster positive was then placed on the wheel and refined using stainless steel ribs. Since there are no undercuts, a one piece mold is possible. This eliminates the effort of cleaning up seams and makes the mold making process much easier.

The positive was once again prepped with oil soap, and used to cast the working negatives.